

VZCZCXRO4175  
PP RUEHBC RUEHDBU RUEHDE RUEHDH RUEHKUK RUEHLH RUEHPW RUEHROV RUEHTRO  
DE RUEHRB #0336/01 1101400  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
P 201400Z APR 09  
FM AMEMBASSY RABAT  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0006  
INFO RUCNISL/ISLAMIC COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RUCNMGH/MAGHREB COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 RABAT 000336

SIPDIS

STATE FOR DRL/IRF, DRL/NESCA AND NEA/MAG, LONDON AND PARIS  
FOR NEA WATCHER

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/13/2019  
TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [SCUL](#) [SOCI](#) [KPAO](#) [KIRF](#) [SP](#) [MO](#)  
SUBJECT: MOROCCO: INSIGHTS INTO RECENT MISSIONARY EXPULSION

REF: A. RABAT 00265  
[B. RABAT 00221](#)  
[C. RABAT 00230](#)  
[D. RABAT 00267](#)  
[E. RABAT 00281](#)  
[F. RABAT 00313](#)  
[G. CASABLANCA 00047](#)

Classified By: POLCOUNS C. Karp for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1. \(C\) Summary: Morocco's expulsion of five Christian women last month accused of proselytizing has created a flurry of concern among the approximate 4,000 local Christians who meet regularly throughout Morocco. Three local Christian leaders from Casablanca \(one of whom legally imports and sells Christian literature\) connected to the incident told us that no one has been officially charged with a crime. With the exception of the recent bible study raid and reports of questioning and surveillance, local Christian leaders were not able to provide any other major current examples of religious persecution against Christians over the past year. Some theorize that the bible study raid in Casablanca is a way for the GOM to show equality after the recent pressure it applied on Shi'a Muslims for proselytizing. It may also be the result of the number of people who were meeting in the apartment without prior permission to organize as a large group. The Catholic Archbishop in Rabat reported that the GOM press agency manipulated comments he made over a year ago and printed a recent story to its benefit immediately after the Casablanca bible study raid. We are in dialogue with the GOM on these issues and await an official reply as we continue to closely monitor the situation. End Summary.](#)

-----  
Poloffs Meet With Local Moroccan Christians  
-----

[2. \(C\) Poloffs met with three local Moroccan Christian men on April 10 who were closely connected with the recent bible study raid in Casablanca that resulted in the expulsion of five Christian foreign women on March 29 for proselytizing \(Ref.A\). Jabiri Mustapha \(Strictly Protect\) is the father of one of the Moroccan women who was questioned after the recent raid. He became a Christian in the 1960's, and served time in prison for being a Christian during the reign of Hassan II. Hmami Zouhair \(Strictly Protect\) has been a Christian for several years. El Hassan Nasry \(Strictly Protect\) is married to one of the Moroccan women responsible for organizing the women's bible study. A Christian entrepreneur, he owns and operates a book shop in Casablanca where he legally imports and sells Christian literature. Nasry rents the apartment where the police raid took place last month and has used this apartment for the past 1 1/2 years to host weekly bible studies and special worship services for local Moroccan Christians.](#)

-----

13. (C) According to Nasry, his wife invited a Spanish relative and some Christian friends living in Spain to Casablanca to have a bible study and offer spiritual encouragement to women members of the local Christian community. None of the foreigners were official missionaries. All of the Moroccan women present had been practicing the Christian faith for many years. There were no Muslims present during the event. Nasry questioned how authorities could have accused the foreigners of proselytizing.

14. (C) The bible study started on Thursday, March 26 and was intended to continue throughout the weekend. The ladies met without any problems Thursday night, Friday night, and Saturday morning. On Saturday afternoon, March 28, the ladies went to the medina to do some tourist shopping and noticed a heavy police presence in the area. As soon as the ladies reconvened at 5:00 PM Saturday, the police knocked on the door of the apartment, requesting entry. When asked to present a warrant, officials responded that in Morocco, we live under emergency law and no warrant was necessary. Authorities confiscated all cell phones, computers, and Christian literature that was present in the apartment.

15. (C) Other Embassy sources report that there were 16 women (9 local Moroccans, 1 American who resides in Casablanca, 1 Iraqi political refugee residing in Casablanca, 4 Spanish and 1 German), 1 man who had come to pick up his wife, and a baby present in the apartment at the time of the arrest.

RABAT 00000336 002 OF 003

Authorities took the Moroccan women to the main police station in Casablanca where they were individually questioned. All of the Moroccan women were released from police custody early in the morning of Sunday, March 29. Authorities brought no immediate charges against them but their cases remain open, meaning they can still potentially face charges. The two non-Moroccans residing in Casablanca were also released with no charges brought against them. The Spanish and German women were escorted to the northern border of Morocco and sent back to Spain on Sunday morning.

-----  
Religious Freedom in Morocco  
-----

16. (C) Poloff asked many times during the interview if the Moroccan church leaders felt that religious freedom in Morocco had improved over the years. Each time, the Moroccans shared persecution stories dating from the reign of Hassan II as well as a few incidents that occurred 3-5 years ago. Poloff asked if they could give specific instances of religious persecution over the past year but they were not able to share any major current examples with the exception of last month's bible study raid. As is the case with many other Moroccan Christians with whom Poloff met previously, the leaders shared examples of social persecution and occasional police harassment (Ref. B). Nasry argued that although the persecution doesn't come directly from the government, it is the government who has the greatest influence on society and that it could do more to combat social persecution if it wanted.

17. (C) According to the Moroccan Church leaders in Casablanca, there are approximately 4,000 Moroccan Christians who meet regularly in underground house churches throughout the country. They suggested that the number of Moroccan Christians could be as high as 8,000, mostly Berber, and living predominately in the South. Nasry said that most Moroccan Christians do not want to meet regularly with others because they fear the social discrimination and possible government harassment.

¶8. (C) The April 2 edition of the Arabic language paper Assabah reported that the Minister of Interior ordered his forces to maintain surveillance of the different churches in the country as well as local and foreign organizations associated with these churches and to note the names of all Moroccan nationals who enter these churches for any purpose. Nasry told Poloffs that since the raid in Casablanca, several Moroccan house churches throughout the country have reported authorities questioning all known Christians of their activities. Some local house churches were even canceling Good Friday and Easter Sunday services. Nasry opined, "They (the GOM) are preparing for something big."

-----  
Spanish Connection To Bible Study Raid?  
-----

¶9. (C) Surprisingly, the Casablanca church leaders suggested that the recent Bible study raid was not an attack on Christianity but rather a result of ongoing discord between Morocco and Spain. Nasry speculated that the raid was likely related to Morocco's March 8 expulsion of a member of the Spanish secret service based in Nador and accused of financing the activities of a Moroccan human rights activist known to be outspoken against the GOM on drug trafficking issues. The church leaders also suggested that recent comments from a Spanish parliamentarian against King Mohammed VI and the activities of Spanish NGO Kif Kif recently speaking out on homosexual rights in Morocco (Ref. C and D) could also be catalysts behind the Casablanca bible study raid.

-----  
Catholic Archbishop Weighs In  
-----

¶10. (C) Rabat Catholic Archbishop Monsignor Vincent Landen met with Poloff on April 15 to discuss religious freedom and the recent events in Casablanca. Monsignor Landen suggested that the reason behind the raid may be due to the number of people present in the apartment. According to the Archbishop, there truly is not freedom of religion for local Moroccans and Moroccan law permits authorities to legally disband any group of more than 10 people who do not have prior permission to meet as a group. Landen also suggested that the raid could have been an opportunity for the GOM to demonstrate equality and fairness after their recent

RABAT 00000336 003 OF 003

targeting of Shi'a proselytizers (Ref.E, F, and G). He also informed Poloff that the March 30 Maghreb Arab Press (Official Government Press Agency) report stating that he and Protestant Church Chairman Jean Luc Blanc issued a formal statement condemning proselytizing immediately following the expulsion of the foreign Christians was false. Landen explained that in April 2008, he and Blanc wrote a press release statement condemning proselytizing in Morocco after a series of press articles highlighted evangelical Christian activity last year. Landen said that MAP refused to publish their statement at the time, held on to it for a year, and pulled it out to use last month when it was convenient for them to do so.

¶11. (C) Comment: Recent GOM activities targeting Shi'a Muslims, Bhai, and Christians will affect the image of religious tolerance that Morocco has fought so hard to protect and build upon over the past several years. Many conspiracy theories exists: from Morocco retaliation against Spain, breaking of political ties with Iran, and attempts to ward off radical Islamic elements leading up to the local June elections. Murmurs of minority groups being questioned by police continue but we are not aware of anyone being charged with a crime, detained as a religious prisoner, or suffering physical abuse. We are in dialogue with the GOM and are awaiting their official response to questions we have

raised about these issues. We will continue to monitor the situation closely. End Comment.

\*\*\*\*\*  
Visit Embassy Rabat's Classified Website;  
<http://www.intelink.sgov.gov/wiki/Portal:Moro> cco  
\*\*\*\*\*

Jackson